A LADY'S SHOE

BARRIE

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By

J. M. Barrie

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A LADY'S SHOE

I

AFTER it is too dark to read, save to those who will travel to their windows in search of light, a man I know is sometimes to be found in his arm-chair, by the fire, toying with a lady's shoe. He is a bachelor—whimsical you will say—and how that frayed shoe became his I know not; for often though he has told me, the tale is never twice the same. When such is his odd mood, he will weave me strange histories of the shoe, and if I would be sad they are sportive, and when one makes me merry he will give it a tragic ending, for such is the nature of the man. Sometimes he is not consistent, which, he quaintly explains, is because he has only one of the shoes ; and he will argue that so-called inanimate objects accustomed to the married

life, such as shoes and gloves and spectacles, mourn the loss of their mate even as Christians do, which he proves, should I smile, by asking whether, though previously hard workers, they are ever, if separated, of much more use in the world. Nor is that the only hard question he asks me ; for when I tell him that all his stories of the shoe cannot be true, he demands of me which of them is necessarily false, and then I have no answer. Perhaps you, too, will be dumb to that question after you have listened to me, if such be your pleasure, while I repeat a little of what he tells me in the twilight, as we sit by the fire looking at the little bronze shoe.

II

A HUNDRED and one years and six months ago, says my friend, who is scrupulously exact about dates where they are of no consequence, that shoe and her partner got their first glimpse of the world. They sat all day in a shoemaker's window in the Strand, look-

ing out upon the great fair which human beings provide for the entertainment of the articles that have the luck to get a seat in shopkeepers' windows, instead of being hung up inside on strings, or hidden away in boxes. They were a very dainty pair, made for the feet of some Cinderella with a godmother, and many ladies stopped to look at them who passed St. Paul's without giving it a glance. But there was a little dressmaker who loved those shoes as no other loved them, and she stood admiring them so often that they got to know her and wondered why she did not come in and buy. You see they had as yet no knowledge of the world, and thought that a trumpery dressmaker ought to have them, just because she had such pretty little feet. They did not understand that beautiful shoes are not for feet that fit them, but for purses that can buy them.

She was not so very little, this dressmaker who hungered for the tiny bronze shoes; but she was only a girl, and she had to sew

for her life all day and often all night, and that, my friend says, is why he calls her the little dressmaker. I suppose he means that she was so small compared to the big foes a poor girl has to fight in London. But though she was poor, she was not unhappy. She not only made pretty dresses out of rich material for fine ladies, such as the shoes were meant for, but pretty, cheap frocks for herself, in which she was delightful to look at. A really pretty girl always looks best in something at twopence-halfpenny the yard, and really plain ones look their worst in silk and velvet. These, be it noted, are my friend's views. The little dressmaker never quite rose to them. She often smiled with satisfaction when she saw herself in a mirror ; but as often she sighed over her sewing, wishing she could see herself in the fine brocades that are meant for my Lady Mary. As it is the duty of all women to look as nice as possible, the little dressmaker cannot be blamed for wishing sometimes that she had five thousand a year. Had she had that

sum, her first purchase would have been the shoes. She often thought of them at nights, and looked at her pretty feet and counted her money, and then shook her head mournfully.

The little dressmaker had only one relative in the whole wide world, and he was a boy of twelve, six or eight years younger than herself. He was her brother, and they lived together in a shabby room that looked bright, for no other reason than because these two loved each other. Will ran errands for anyone who would employ him, and he had such an appetite that he often felt compelled to apologize for it. The little dressmaker could have bought the shoes to which she had given her heart, had she not known that the consuming desire of Will was to possess a certain magnificent knife.

"How absurd of Will," the little dressmaker often said to herself, "to want that ugly knife. What can he do with it, except cut his fingers?"

At these times she could not help compar-

ing boys to girls, and thinking that the desires of her own sex were much more reasonable, for what could be more natural and proper than to pine for the loveliest pair of bronze shoes?

Will knew why his sister often gazed at these shoes, and he would smile at her infatuation.

"How foolish girls are!" was his comment to himself. "No sensible person could see that knife without wishing to own it; but what does it matter whether one wears pretty shoes or ugly shoes, or even no shoes at all?"

Nevertheless, those two loved each other, and Will would have liked his sister to get the shoes, if only he could get the knife as well. The little dressmaker loved Will even more than that, and was determined that he should have the knife, though she had to give up the shoes.

Can you see her at the shoemaker's window, looking at the shoes, and then at her own feet, until she felt certain that all the

Strand was laughing at her? Once she went into the shop and asked the price of the shoes. She came out scared. Next day, notwithstanding, she was back at the window, with the money in her possession, and it almost compelled her to go in and buy. She had to run away. After that she left the money at home, lest it should some day drag her into the shop.

She tried to avoid the Strand altogether, but still her feet took her there against her will, for you cannot conceive how anxious they were to step into those little bronze shoes.

The little dressmaker, who was the most unselfish of women, despised herself for her vanity, and thought to be happy again by buying the knife without delay. Then the shoes would be beyond her reach as completely as if some great lady had bought them.

"Here is the money for the knife, Will," she said, bravely, one day, and Will grasped the money, which was in many pieces, all earned with toil.

"But the shoes?" Will said, repressing his desire to rush out for the knife.

"I don't care about them," his sister said, turning her head away.

"It is not," Will said, uncomfortably, "as if you had no shoes. Those are nice ones you are wearing now."

They were not really nice ones. It was quite a shame that such pretty feet should be libelled by them. But these were matters which Will did not understand.

"And all one wants of shoes," he said, "is that they should have no holes in them."

"That is all," answered the little dressmaker, with a courageous smile, and she spoke of the knife with such interest that Will set off to buy it, convinced that she no longer cared about the shoes. Forgetting something, however, he turned back for it, and behold, he found the little dressmaker in tears. You must not blame her. It was quite a big sacrifice she had made, and therefore, though she was crying, she was not very unhappy. Unselfishness is the best

cure for trouble. Will, of course, did not realize this. He suddenly remembered that, though they were so poor, he seemed to get everything he wanted very much, while she seemed to get nothing. He was stricken with remorse, and said craftily that he wanted her to come with him to buy the knife. Well, she went with him, and presently she discovered that it was not the knife he meant to buy.

"Oh, Will," she whispered, trembling, "I won't have the shoes. I want you to get the knife."

"Pooh," said Will, grandly, "I don't care to have the knife. What use do I have for it?"

"You will make me wretched, Will," the little dressmaker said, "if you buy the shoes. These I have are quite nice ones."

"You are to have the shoes," replied Will, firmly. "No one could look so pretty in them as you will do."

"Oh, Will, have you noticed?" faltered the little dressmaker, meaning had Will

noticed that her feet really were made for lovely shoes.

"Of course I have," answered Will, not at all understanding what she was referring to.

"But I can't spend so much money on myself," she said.

"It is my money now," said Will, triumphantly, "and I am to give you the shoes as a present."

Feeling like a man, he requested her to take his arm, and so they advanced along the Strand, making quite a gallant show for such wayfarers as could read faces. Alas! they reached the shop too late. The shoes were gone. An hour earlier they had been bought by an heiress, for whom they were too small. The shopkeeper had pointed this out to her courteously, but she, too, had fallen in love with the pretty shoes, and her only answer to him was, "I buy them : I undertake to get into them." Now we must leave the sad little dressmaker and follow the fortunes of the shoes.

III

I INTERRUPTED my friend at this point, saying, "It is the little dressmaker I am interested in; not the shoes. Tell me more of her."

"She vanished out of my knowledge at that point in her history," he answered; "I don't know what became of her."

"A story-teller," I complained, "has no right to close his tale so abruptly. It is his duty to leave nothing to the public's imagination."

"Mine," he said, "is not a story, it is only something that happened, and I warned you that I did not know the end. In real life you never get the end of a story, but you can guess it if you will."

"Then," I said, "I guess that the little dressmaker——"

"Had more severe disappointments in after life than the loss of a pair of shoes," he said.

"But had a happy future," I broke in,

almost entreating him to say the words. "When her brother became a man he gave her a pretty house in the suburbs to be mistress of, and she was as happy as——"

"As Ruth Pinch," he suggested; "no, I think Will married, and left the little dressmaker alone in the shabby room."

"Until she married, you mean?"

"Or until," said my friend, very sadly, "she was damned to all eternity that a gentleman might have his pleasure."

"Don't say that," I implored.

"The little dressmaker is dead," he answered, "and the worms have eaten her long ago, so it does not matter much." Then he looked at me sharply: "If I cannot give the story an end," he said, "I can at least give it a moral. When I was in your house yesterday I found a pale little governess teaching your children, and I thought (forgive me) that you were somewhat brusque to her. She was the little dressmaker over again. Ah, sir, that is what I mean when I say that the stories in real life have no ending! The

brave little dressmaker is still in London; you brush against her in every street, you meet her in scores of houses. Remember that little bit of her history, and you will help to make her next scene brighter. And now I must tell you of her who bought the shoes and took them to Gretna Green, and of how they entirely altered her future because they were a size too small. This time the story has an ending, or what passes for such in a world of make-believe. It is about a grandfather of mine, too, whose marriage, as you shall hear, was entirely arranged by this shoe."

IV

Miss May Gregory, the heiress into whose possession the shoes passed, was a lovely creature on a somewhat large scale, and having only lately left school, she was desperately anxious to be married. So anxious was she, that matrimony was the first consideration, and the man only the second. She had two lovers, whom she called Jack

and Tom, and she was so fond of both that she would have married either. Her papa, who knew her pretty well, said she was a sentimental goose, and he was so feared by both Jack and Tom, that when they heard his voice in the stilly night asking who that was playing the guitar beneath his daughter's window, they leaped the orchard wall and ran.

"You can't marry both," Mr. Gregory explained to Miss May; "and as they would only make a man between them, it is obvious that you marry neither. No tears, please, and let me hear less nonsense about love; whoever heard of a girl's loving two men at once?"

Miss May thought her papa very unfeeling, and pointed out that, of course, she only loved one of them. Her tragedy was that she could not decide which one.

My own idea is that they were so very much alike that a lady could not be indifferent to the one and love the other. But I am a bachelor, and often wonder how young ladies can choose a young man out of so many

young men of the same pattern and hold him higher than the rest. Financially Jack and Tom were easily distinguished, however. Jack had ready money but no prospects; Tom had prospects (he said) but no ready money. You may be sure that Miss May considered this no difference at all. She had sufficient money and prospects for both herself and her husband, whichever one he should prove to be.

Though it was in London that Miss May bought the shoes, it was in a provincial town that she first tried to get into them, the town where she and her severe papa lived. She was going to the theatre that night, and to Gretna Green afterward, if the fates proved friendly. It was her father who was to take her to the theatre, and Jack who was to take her to Gretna Green. The arrangements had been made cleverly, as you will see.

For nearly half an hour did the carriage wait at the door before Miss May was ready to step into it. When she at last joined her father, who was fuming, for he detested

being late for the play, her face was red. I wish I could say that this was because she was blushing or had been crying over the impropriety of the contemplated runaway marriage. But it was not. Miss May was merely red in the face because her fight with the shoes had been protracted. She had gained a momentary triumph, however, for, in her own words, she had "got into them." True they pinched and made her stumble in her walk, but she had only to walk a few yards to the carriage and another few yards from the playhouse door to a box.

I have forgotten what the play was; it was, probably, one of the dull comedies that are now esteemed and edited because they are old. Many people were crowding into the house, and in the vestibule stood Jack, who made a sign to his lady that all was well. Then he disappeared without being seen by the father he was hoodwinking. Tom was less fortunate. That is to say, the father did see him. He was also more fortunate, however, for he had a few moments'

talk with Miss May. That lady ought not, perhaps, to have let Tom know that she was coming to the play to-night. She was really Jack's now, or about to be, if the plot did not miscarry. But was it not natural that she should feel sorry for Tom? That day she had sent him back his letters (he used to slip them into her hands, and she kept them in a box beside Jack's letters), with an intimation that all was now over between them. She had also added that she was going to the play that night, and I suppose her reason for this injudicious act was that she looked forward to a delightfully sad parting with him. But Miss May had not quite understood Tom. In the crush at the theatre she held out her hand (the one further from her papa) that Tom might squeeze it surreptitiously. Thus did she hope to break the blow. But frantic Tom would have none of her hand. He stalked after her into the box, and in the presence of her father demanded an explanation. Miss May, who was already beginning to wish that she had

never seen those lovely little bronze shoes—they were hurting her so much—wept at Tom's grief and admired him for his vehemence. As for the father, he was first amazed, secondly delighted, and thirdly afraid. It was pleasant to him to hear that his daughter was determined to be done with the youth, but disquieting to observe that the whole house was listening to Tom's declamation. Tom promising to lower his voice, papa consented to leave the box for five minutes that the farewells might take place in privacy.

In that five minutes the second last act of a tragedy was played in the back of the box. Tom announced that his prospects were now death by his own pistol. Miss May, in terror, put her hands on his shoulders ; and then, remembering Jack, withdrew them. She had promised Jack not to say a word of the conspiracy to Tom, but nowit all came out. At half-past nine a written note was to be handed in to Miss May, purporting to come from an aunt of hers who was in a box

beneath. The note was to ask her and her papa to join the aunt. Papa loathed the aunt, and was therefore certain to refuse; but he would let Miss May go. In the lobby she was to be joined by Jack, whisked into a carriage that was already waiting near the theatre door, and borne off in the direction of Gretna Green. There was quite a chance of the runaways being twenty miles off before the chase began.

"So farewell, Tom, dear Tom," said Miss May. But dear Tom, forgetting his promise to papa, began to stamp, calling her the most horrid names, and thus delighting her.

"You know how I could love you," she said, picking her tenses carefully. "But am I to blame if you are so poor?"

"You could wait for me. My prospects——"

"I can't wait, Tom; good-by. Kiss me, Tom, for the last time."

"I won't. You are a heartless coquette. May, if that carriage had been mine, would you have come with me?"

"I—I don't know."

Men should not distress women with such difficult questions.

"Kiss me, Tom, for the last time."

"I won't."

Then, like a sensible man, Tom changed his mind, and kissed her passionately.

"It is not for the last time," he said, fiercely. "May, you love me, and me alone, and Jack shall not have you ; he shall not. I have an idea ; quick, tell me how I shall know Jack's carriage ?"

Miss May, wondering, had just began to answer him, when papa reappeared. Tom departed, but not with the look of a hopeless man on his face. As for the young lady, having treated dear Tom so kindly, she naturally began to think lovingly of dear Jack.

V

THE ruse with the letter succeeded. Miss May was trembling a little when she left the box. Had her papa flung her a kind word

just then she might have postponed the elopement ; but he asked her grumpily why she was looking at him so sentimentally, and, of course, after that she hesitated no longer. He little thought as the door closed on her that the next time they met she would be a married woman.

Miss May always maintained afterward that from the moment when she left her father's box until she realized that she was in a carriage beside Jack, all was a blank to her. The theatre attendant, however, who saw the carriage drive off, and described the scene subsequently to the infuriated father, declared that she was less agitated than her lover.

"I suppose Jack carried me down that dark street to the carriage," was Miss May's surmise.

"The gentleman was a little excited-like, but the lady she were wonderful cool," was the attendant's declaration. His story ended thus :

"They had started, when the lady she gave

a scream, and the carriage stopped, and the gentleman he jumped out and looked for something in the street. He got it, too, and then he jumps in beside her again, and off they go at a spanking rate. I don't know what it was ; something she had dropped, most likely."

To his dying day this man was denied the small pleasure of knowing what Jack jumped out of the carriage to pick up. It was one of the shoes. Miss May's feet had been protesting so vigorously in the theatre against further confinement in their narrow prison house that with one foot she had pressed the shoe half off the other. In the street the shoe fell off and Jack had to find it, for although in Scotland one may marry in a hurry, one's feet must be properly shod. So Miss May thought then, but she was presently to discover that a pair of shoes are a convenient possession rather than indispensable.

Through the greater part of the night the carriage rolled northward, but at last an inn

(now, I believe, a private house) was reached, where they had to wait three hours for fresh horses. Miss May had a bedroom, but did not sleep a wink (she said), while the nervous Jack paced up and down in front of the inn, listening for horses in pursuit, and thinking he heard them every five minutes.

If a man can be too gentlemanly, that man seems to have been Jack throughout this escapade. Until he could claim her as his wife, he would not take even what she called formal liberties. He sat on the seat opposite her. He paid her no compliments; he addressed her as Miss Gregory, which had not been his custom. Of course, she admired this delicacy, but still——

The journey was resumed with early light, and now, as they stepped once more into their carriage, both of the runaways looked hard at one of the postilions.

"Surely, you are not the man I engaged yesterday?" Jack said to him.

"No, my lord," answered the fellow, com-

posedly ; "he were took ill, and offered me his place. No offence intended, my lord. I have been on this here kind of job before."

"You have been to Gretna Green before ?"

"Raythe r."

"You will do as well as another. Drive on."

Miss May said nothing to the man, but she thought a good deal about him. Despite his dark hair and sallow complexion, despite his boorish manners, she thought him very like Tom. It was Tom in disguise. He had bribed the real postilion, and here he was on his way to Scotland with the woman he wanted to marry, but by no means certain how he was to get her.

Within twenty miles of the border there is a hillock which commands an extensive view. It is close to the old high road, and many a man bound for Gretna Green has run up to it to see whether his pursuers were in sight. Jack was one of the number. He was not gone many minutes, but in the

meantime Tom had found an opportunity of revealing himself to the lady.

"May," he said, appearing so suddenly by her side that she screamed, "don't you know me? I am Tom. May, dearest, you said you would marry me if I could take you to Scotland. I am doing it."

"Oh, Tom!" wailed Miss May, all in a tremble (as she said afterwards), "I never made any such promise. I am to marry Jack."

"Never!" cried Tom. "May, darling May——"

"Tom, Tom!" said Miss May, reproachfully, "why did you come to disturb my peace of mind, when everything was going on so nicely?"

"Love of my life!" began Tom, then kissed her hand and resumed his seat beside the other postilion. He had seen Jack running back.

"We are pursued," Jack said, as he drew near, panting, "by two men on horseback, and one of them, I am convinced, is your father."

The carriage rolled on more quickly now than ever, and for the next half-hour Miss May thought little of which of her lovers she should marry. Her new fear was that she would not be able to marry at all. Jack was as polite as ever. Certainly Tom had been less delicate. He had called her his darling, he had kissed her hand. He should not have taken these liberties, but still——

In vain were the jaded horses of the runaways whipped up. The pursuers gained on the carriage until, when the latter was within half a mile of the border, they were not four hundred yards behind.

"There is only one chance for us, May," said poor Jack, forgetting in his excitement that she was not May, but Miss Gregory; "we must leave the carriage at the next turn of the road which hides us from view."

"And be overtaken in a moment!" cried Miss May, aghast.

"I hope not," said Jack. "Listen, dear, to what I propose. At the next turn I will stop the carriage, and you will at once jump

out with me. I will tell our fellows to drive on as fast as they can, and you and I will conceal ourselves until your father and his companion have galloped past. They will pursue the carriage. In the meantime you and I will cross these fields to the village, whose lights I see plainly, and there the blacksmith will marry us."

"They will overtake the carriage in a few minutes," the lady said, "and finding it empty, hurry on to Gretna Green. Why, we shall find them waiting for us there."

"We shall not," answered Jack, triumphantly, with his head out at the window. "I see two roads before us, of which the one evidently leads to Gretna Green, and the other to the right. I will tell our fellows to take the latter; that will give us a good start."

Jack stopped the carriage and assisted his lady out, at the same time shouting directions to the two men. "Stop!" he cried to them, as they were driving off. "One of you come with me; we may need a witness." Tom jumped down. The carriage drove on.

The two men and the woman hid. The horsemen, of whom Mr. Gregory was purple with passion, raced by them.

"And now for Gretna Green on foot!" said Jack, giving Miss May his arm.

They hurried on, but—the shoe! Miss May had this time no maid to help her, and the shoe was but half on. She was sliding her foot along the ground, rather than lifting it. By and by, when they were not a hundred yards from the old toll-house, which is just on the other side of the border, Miss May sank to the ground, crying, "I can go no further; I have lost one of my shoes!"

There was no time to look for the shoe in the twilight.

"Assist her to that cottage," said Jack to the supposed postilion, pointing to the toll-house, "and I will hasten on to the village and bring the blacksmith back with me. Ask them to hide her, if need be. You will be well paid."

So saying, Jack ran on, while Tom obeyed his injunctions to the letter. With Miss

May's assistance he explained the position to the toll-keeper, who grinned when he heard that the bridegroom was running to Gretna Green for the blacksmith.

"You English," he said, "think that there is but one man in broad Scotland who can make a couple one in a hurry, and you call him the blacksmith, though he is no blacksmith at all. If your lover, honey, had stopped here, I should have had you spliced by this time."

"Is that true?" cried Tom, while Miss May stared.

"I have married scores in my time," the old man answered. "Why, I married half-a-dozen this week."

"But is it legal?" asked May.

The toll-keeper smiled.

"Try it, honey," he suggested.

Then it was Tom's turn to speak.

"May," he said, in a tone of conviction, "this is providential. Old gentleman, marry us as quickly as you can. Get your family as witnesses, if witnesses are necessary."

The toll-keeper looked at the lady.

"No, no," she said, "I promised Jack. Oh, Tom, how I wish there had been only one of you!"

For half an hour did Miss May refuse to listen to what Tom called reason. Then she started up, for she was sure she heard the gallop of horses.

"Tom!" she cried.

So she and Tom were married. Jack and Mr. Gregory arrived at the toll-house five minutes afterward, but it was all over by that time.

VI

THUS my friend ended his story, adding that his grandfather had come out of the affair victorious.

"So that your grandfather was Tom?" I said.

"If," he replied, coolly, "you think Tom was the victor."

"Well, he got her."

"And Jack did not. But perhaps Jack was the luckier man of the two."

"Then was Jack your grandfather?"

"I won't say. I leave it to you to decide which was victorious, the one who got her or the one who lost her."

"It must have been Tom. You told me that your grandfather's marriage was entirely arranged by a shoe."

"Yes, I said so, but both of their marriages were arranged by a shoe, for Jack subsequently married another lady, and, of course, it was the shoe that led to his marrying her instead of Miss May."

"At least," I said, "tell me which of the two shoes this is."

"That would be telling all," he replied, "for Tom retained possession of the shoe in which Miss May was married, and Jack found the other one next morning. To tell you which shoe this is would be to tell you which man was my grandfather. Can't you guess? I have told you he was the one who had reason to be thankful that the lady became Mrs. Tom. Now, which one was that?"

Reader, which do you think?

THE INCONSIDERATE WAITER

THE INCONSIDERATE WAITER

FREQUENTLY I have to ask myself in the street for the name of the man I bowed to just now, and then, before I can answer, the wind of the first corner blows him from my memory. I have a theory, however, that those puzzling faces, which pass before I can see who cut the coat, all belong to club-waiters.

Until William forced his affairs upon me, that was all I did know of the private life of waiters, though I have been in the club for twenty years. I was even unaware whether they slept down-stairs or had their own homes, nor had I the interest to inquire of other members, nor they the knowledge to inform me. I hold that this sort of people should be fed and clothed and given airing

and wives and children, and I subscribe yearly, I believe, for these purposes ; but to come into closer relation with waiters is bad form ; they are club fittings, and William should have kept his distress to himself or taken it away and patched it up, like a rent in one of the chairs. His inconsiderateness has been a pair of spectacles to me for months.

It is not correct taste to know the name of a club-waiter, so that I must apologize for knowing William's, and still more for not forgetting it. If, again, to speak of a waiter is bad form, to speak bitterly is the comic degree of it. But William has disappointed me sorely. There were years when I would defer dining several minutes that he might wait on me. His pains to reserve the window-seat for me were perfectly satisfactory. I allowed him privileges, as to suggest dishes, and would give him information, as that someone had startled me in the reading-room by slamming a door. I have shown him how I cut my finger with a piece of

string. Obviously he was gratified by these attentions, usually recommending a liqueur; and I fancy he must have understood my sufferings, for he often looked ill himself. Probably he was rheumatic, but I cannot say for certain, as I never thought of asking, and he had the sense to see that the knowledge would be offensive to me.

In the smoking-room we have a waiter so independent that once, when he brought me a yellow Chartreuse, and I said I had ordered green, he replied, "No, sir; you said yellow." William could never have been guilty of such effrontery. In appearance, of course, he is mean, but I can no more describe him than a milkmaid could draw cows. I suppose we distinguish one waiter from another much as we pick our hat from the rack. We could have plotted a murder safely before William. He never presumed to have opinions of his own. When such was my mood he remained silent, and if I announced that something diverting had happened to me he

laughed before I told him what it was. He turned the twinkle in his eye off or on at my bidding as readily as if it was the gas. To my "Sure to be wet to-morrow," he would reply, "Yes, sir;" and to Trelawney's "It doesn't look like rain," two minutes afterward, he would reply, "No, sir." It was one member who said Lightning Rod would win the Derby and another who said Lightning Rod had no chance, but it was William who agreed with both. He was like a cheroot, which may be smoked from either end. So used was I to him that, had he died or got another situation (or whatever it is such persons do when they disappear from the club), I should probably have told the head waiter to bring him back, as I disliked changes.

It would not become me to know precisely when I began to think William an ingrate, but I date his lapse from the evening when he brought me oysters. I detest oysters, and no one knew it better than William. He has agreed with me that he could not under-

stand any gentleman's liking them. Between me and a certain member who smacks his lips twelve times to a dozen of them, William knew I liked a screen to be placed until we had reached the soup, and yet he gave me the oysters and the other man my sardine. Both the other member and I called quickly for brandy and the head waiter. To do William justice, he shook, but never can I forget his audacious explanation, "Beg pardon, sir, but I was thinking of something else."

In these words William had flung off the mask, and now I knew him for what he was.

I must not be accused of bad form for looking at William on the following evening. What prompted me to do so was not personal interest in him, but a desire to see whether I dare let him wait on me again. So, recalling that a castor was off a chair yesterday, one is entitled to make sure that it is on to-day before sitting down. If the expression is not too strong, I may say that

I was taken aback by William's manner. Even when crossing the room to take my orders he let his one hand play nervously with the other. I had to repeat "Sardine on toast" twice, and instead of answering "Yes, sir," as if my selection of sardine on toast was a personal gratification to him, which is the manner one expects of a waiter, he glanced at the clock, then out of the window, and, starting, asked, "Did you say sardine on toast, sir?"

It was the height of summer, when London smells like a chemist's shop, and he who has the dinner-table at the window needs no candles to show him his knife and fork. I lay back at intervals, now watching a starved-looking woman asleep on a doorstep, and again complaining of the club bananas. By and by, I saw a little girl of the commonest kind, ill-clad and dirty, as all these arabs are. Their parents should be compelled to feed and clothe them comfortably, or at least to keep them indoors, where they cannot offend our eyes. Such children are for pushing aside

with one's umbrella; but this girl I noticed because she was gazing at the club windows. She had stood thus for perhaps ten minutes, when I became aware that someone was leaning over me, to look out at the window. I turned round. Conceive my indignation on seeing that the rude person was William.

"How dare you, William?" I said, sternly. He seemed not to hear me. Let me tell, in the measured words of one describing a past incident, what then took place. To get nearer the window, he pressed heavily on my shoulder.

"William, you forget yourself!" I said, meaning—as I see now—that he had forgotten me.

I heard him gulp, but not to my reprimand. He was scanning the street. His hands chattered on my shoulder, and, pushing him from me, I saw that his mouth was agape.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

He stared at me, and then, like one who had at last heard the echo of my question,

seemed to be brought back to the club. He turned his face from me for an instant, and answered, shakily:

"I beg your pardon, sir!—I shouldn't have done it. Are the bananas too ripe, sir?"

He recommended the nuts, and awaited my verdict so anxiously while I ate one that I was about to speak graciously, when I again saw his eyes drag him to the window.

"William," I said, my patience giving way at last; "I dislike being waited on by a melancholy waiter."

"Yes, sir," he replied, trying to smile, and then broke out passionately, "For God's sake, sir, tell me, have you seen a little girl looking in at the club windows?"

He had been a good waiter once and his distracted visage was spoiling my dinner.

"There," I said, pointing to the girl, and no doubt would have added that he must bring me coffee immediately, had he continued to listen. But already he was beckoning to the child. I had not the least interest in

her (indeed it never struck me that waiters had private affairs, and I still think it a pity that they should have); but as I happened to be looking out at the window I could not avoid seeing what occurred. As soon as the girl saw William she ran into the middle of the street, regardless of vehicles, and nodded three times to him. Then she disappeared.

I have said that she was quite a common child, without attraction of any sort, and yet it was amazing the difference she made in William. He gasped relief, like one who has broken through the anxiety that checks breathing, and into his face there came a silly laugh of happiness. I had dined well, on the whole, so I said:

"I am glad to see you cheerful again, William."

I meant that I approved his cheerfulness, because it helped my digestion, but he must needs think I was sympathizing with him.

"Thank you, sir," he answered. "Oh,

sir ! when she nodded and I saw it was all right, I could have gone down on my knees to God."

I was as much horrified as if he had dropped a plate on my toes. Even William, disgracefully emotional as he was at the moment, flung out his arms to recall the shameful words.

"Coffee, William !" I said, sharply.

I sipped my coffee indignantly, for it was plain to me that William had something on his mind.

"You are not vexed with me, sir ?" he had the hardihood to whisper.

"It was a liberty," I said.

"I know, sir ; but I was beside myself."

"That was a liberty also."

He hesitated, and then blurted out :

"It is my wife, sir. She——"

I stopped him with my hand. William, whom I had favored in so many ways, was a married man ! I might have guessed as much years before had I ever reflected about waiters, for I knew vaguely that his class

did this sort of thing. His confession was distasteful to me, and I said, warningly:

"Remember where you are, William."

"Yes, sir; but, you see, she is so delicate——"

"Delicate! I forbid you speaking to me on unpleasant topics."

"Yes, sir; begging your pardon."

It was characteristic of William to beg my pardon and withdraw his wife like some unsuccessful dish, as if its taste would not remain in the mouth. I shall be chided for questioning him further about his wife, but, though doubtless an unusual step, it was only bad form superficially, for my motive was irreproachable. I inquired for his wife, not because I was interested in her welfare, but in the hope of allaying my irritation. So I am entitled to invite the wayfarer who has bespattered me with mud to scrape it off.

I desired to be told by William that the girl's signals meant his wife's recovery to health. He should have seen that such was

my wish and answered accordingly. But, with the brutal inconsiderateness of his class, he said :

"She has had a good day, but the doctor, he—the doctor is afeard she is dying."

Already I repented my question. William and his wife seemed in league against me, when they might so easily have chosen some other member.

"Pooh the doctor," I said.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

"Have you been married long, William?"

"Eight years, sir. Eight years ago she was—I—I mind her when . . . and now the doctor says——"

The fellow gaped at me. "More coffee, sir?" he asked.

"What is her ailment?"

"She was always one of the delicate kind, but full of spirit, and—and you see she has had a baby lately——"

"William!"

"And she—I—the doctor is afeared she's not picking up."

"I feel sure she will pick up."

"Yes, sir?"

It must have been the wine I had drunk that made me tell him:

"I was once married, William. My wife —it was just such a case as yours."

"She did not get better, sir?"

"No."

After a pause, he said, "Thank you, sir," meaning for the sympathy that made me tell him that. But it must have been the wine.

"That little girl comes here with a message from your wife?"

"Yes; if she nods three times, it means that my wife is a little better."

"She nodded thrice to-day."

"But she is told to do that to relieve me, and maybe those nods don't tell the truth."

"Is she your girl?"

"No, we have none but the baby. She is a neighbor's. She comes twice a day."

"It is heartless of her parents not to send her every hour."

"But she is six years old," he said, "and has a house and two sisters to look after in the daytime, and a dinner to cook. Gentlefolk don't understand."

"I suppose you live in some low part, William."

"Off Drury Lane," he answered, flushing; "but—but it isn't low. You see, we were never used to anything better, and I mind when I let her see the house before we were married, she—she a sort of cried, because she was so proud of it. That was eight years ago, and now—she's afeard she'll die when I'm away at my work."

"Did she tell you that?"

"Never. She always says she is feeling a little stronger."

"Then how can you know she is afraid of that?"

"I don't know how I know, sir, but when I am leaving the house in the morning I look at her from the door, and she looks at me, and then I—I know."

"A green Chartreuse, William!"

I tried to forget William's vulgar story in billiards, but he had spoiled my game. My opponent, to whom I can give twenty, ran out when I was sixty-seven, and I put aside my cue pettishly. That in itself was bad form, but what would they have thought had they known that a waiter's impertinence caused it ! I grew angrier with William as the night wore on, and next day I punished him by giving my orders through another waiter.

As I had my window seat, I could not but see that the girl was late again. Somehow I dawdled over my coffee. I had an evening paper before me, but there was so little in it that my eyes found more of interest in the street. It did not matter to me whether William's wife died, but when that girl had promised to come, why did she not come? These lower classes only give their word to break it. The coffee was undrinkable.

At last I saw her. William was at another window, pretending to do something with the curtains. I stood up, pressing closer

to the window. The coffee had been so bad that I felt shaky. She nodded three times and smiled.

"She is a little better," William whispered to me, almost gayly.

"Whom are you speaking of?" I asked, coldly, and immediately retired to the billiard-room, where I played a capital game. The coffee was much better there than in the dining-room.

Several days passed, and I took care to show William that I had forgotten his maunderings. I chanced to see the little girl (though I never looked for her) every evening and she always nodded three times, save once, when she shook her head, and then William's face grew white as a napkin. I remember this incident because that night I could not get into a pocket. So badly did I play that the thought of it kept me awake in bed, and that, again, made me wonder how William's wife was. Next day I went to the club early (which was not my custom) to see the new books. Being in the club

at any rate, I looked into the dining-room to ask William if I had left my gloves there, and the sight of him reminded me of his wife, so I asked for her. He shook his head mournfully, and I went off in a rage.

So accustomed am I to the club, that when I dine elsewhere I feel uncomfortable next morning, as if I had missed a dinner. William knew this; yet here he was, hounding me out of the club! That evening I dined (as the saying is) at a restaurant, where no sauce was served with the asparagus. Furthermore, as if that were not triumph enough for William, his doleful face came between me and every dish, and I seemed to see his wife dying to annoy me.

I dined next day at the club, for self-preservation, taking, however, a table in the middle of the room, and engaging a waiter who had once nearly poisoned me by not interfering when I put two lumps of sugar into my coffee instead of one, which is my allowance. But no William came to me to ac-

knowledge his humiliation, and by and by I became aware that he was not in the room. Suddenly the thought struck me that his wife must be dead, and I——. It was the worst-cooked and the worst-served dinner I ever had in the club.

I tried the smoking-room. Usually the talk there is entertaining : but on that occasion it was so frivolous that I did not remain five minutes. In the card-room a member told me, excitedly, that a policeman had spoken rudely to him ; and my strange comment was :

"After all, it is a small matter."

In the library, where I had not been for years, I found two members asleep, and, to my surprise, William on a ladder dusting books.

"You have not heard, sir?" he said in answer to my raised eyebrows. Descending the ladder he whispered, tragically :

"It was last evening, sir. I—I lost my head and I—swore at a member."

I stepped back from William, and glanced

apprehensively at the two members. They still slept.

"I hardly knew," William went on, "what I was doing all day yesterday, for I had left my wife so weakly that——"

I stamped my foot.

"I beg your pardon for speaking of her," he had the grace to say, "but I couldn't help slipping to the window often yesterday to look for Jenny, and when she did come and I saw she was crying, it—it a sort of confused me, and I didn't know right, sir, what I was doing. I hit against a member, Mr. Myddleton Finch, and he—he jumped and swore at me. Well, sir, I had just touched him after all, and I was so miserable, it a kind of stung me to be treated like—like that, and me a man as well as him, and I lost my senses, and—and I swore back."

William's shamed head sank on his chest, but I even let pass his insolence in likening himself to a member of the club, so afraid was I of the sleepers waking and detecting me in talk with a waiter.

"For the love of God," William cried, with coarse emotion, "don't let them dismiss me!"

"Speak lower!" I said. "Who sent you here?"

"I was turned out of the dining-room at once, and told to attend to the library until they had decided what to do with me. Oh, sir, I'll lose my place!"

He was blubbering, as if a change of waiters was a matter of importance.

"This is very bad, William," I said. "I fear I can do nothing for you."

"Have mercy on a distracted man!" he entreated. "I'll go on my knees to Mr. Myddleton Finch."

How could I but despise a fellow who would be thus abject for a pound a week?

"I dare not tell her," he continued, "that I have lost my place. She would just fall back and die."

"I forbade you speaking of your wife," I said, sharply, "unless you can speak pleasantly of her."

"But she may be worse now, sir, and I cannot even see Jenny from here. The library windows look to the back."

"If she dies," I said, "it will be a warning to you to marry a stronger woman next time."

Now, everyone knows that there is little real affection among the lower orders. As soon as they have lost one mate they take another. Yet William, forgetting our relative positions, drew himself up and raised his fist, and if I had not stepped back I swear he would have struck me.

The highly improper words William used I will omit, out of consideration for him. Even while he was apologizing for them I retired to the smoking-room, where I found the cigarettes so badly rolled that they would not keep alight. After a little I remembered that I wanted to see Myddleton Finch about an improved saddle of which a friend of his has the patent. He was in the news-room, and having questioned him about the saddle, I said :

"By the way, what is this story about your swearing at one of the waiters?"

"You mean about his swearing at me," Myddleton Finch replied, reddening.

"I am glad that was it," I said. "For I could not believe you guilty of such bad form."

"If I did swear——" he was beginning, but I went on:

"The version which reached me was that you swore at him, and he repeated the word. I heard he was to be dismissed and you reprimanded."

"Who told you that?" asked Myddleton Finch, who is a timid man.

"I forget; it is club talk," I replied, lightly. "But of course the committee will take your word. The waiter, whichever one he is, richly deserves his dismissal for insulting you without provocation."

Then our talk returned to the saddle, but Myddleton Finch was abstracted, and presently he said:

"Do you know, I fancy I was wrong in

thinking that waiter swore at me, and I'll withdraw my charge to-morrow."

Myddleton Finch then left me, and, sitting alone, I realized that I had been doing William a service. To some slight extent I may have intentionally helped him to retain his place in the club, and I now see the reason, which was that he alone knows precisely to what extent I like my claret heated.

For a mere second I remembered William's remark that he should not be able to see the girl Jenny from the library windows. Then this recollection drove from my head that I had only dined in the sense that my dinner-bill was paid. Returning to the dining-room, I happened to take my chair at the window, and while I was eating a devilled kidney I saw in the street the girl whose nods had such an absurd effect on William.

The children of the poor are as thoughtless as their parents, and this Jenny did not sign to the windows in the hope that William might see her, though she could not see him. Her face, which was disgracefully

dirty, bore doubt and dismay on it, but whether she brought good news it would not tell. Somehow I had expected her to signal when she saw me, and, though her message could not interest me, I was in the mood in which one is irritated at that not taking place which he is awaiting. Ultimately she seemed to be making up her mind to go away——

A boy was passing with the evening papers, and I hurried out to get one, rather thoughtlessly, for we have all the papers in the club. Unfortunately I misunderstood the direction the boy had taken; but round the first corner (out of sight of the club windows) I saw the girl Jenny, and so I asked her how William's wife was.

"Did he send you to me?" she replied, impertinently taking me for a waiter. "My!" she added, after a second scrutiny, "I b'lieve you're one of them. His missis is a bit better, and I was to tell him as she took all the tapiocar."

"How could you tell him?" I asked.

"I was to do like this," she replied, and

went through the supping of something out of a plate in dumb show.

"That would not show she ate all the tapioca," I said.

"But I was to end like this," she answered, licking an imaginary plate with her tongue. I gave her a shilling (to get rid of her), and returned to the club disgusted.

Later in the evening I had to go to the club library for a book, and while William was looking in vain for it (I had forgotten the title) I said to him:

"By the way, William, Mr. Myddleton Finch is to tell the committee that he was mistaken in the charge he brought against you, so you will doubtless be restored to the dining-room to-morrow."

The two members were still in their chairs, probably sleeping lightly; yet he had the effrontery to thank me.

"Don't thank me," I said, blushing at the imputation. "Remember your place, William!"

"But Mr. Myddleton Finch knew I swore," he insisted.

"A gentleman," I replied, stiffly, "cannot remember for twenty-four hours what a waiter has said to him."

"No, sir, but——"

To stop him I had to say:

"And, ah, William, your wife is a little better. She has eaten the tapioca—all of it."

"How can you know, sir?"

"By an accident."

"Jenny signed to the window?"

"No."

"Then you saw her, and went out, and——"

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, sir, to do that for me! May God bl——"

"William!"

"Forgive me, sir, but—when I tell my missis, she will say it was thought of your own wife as made you do it."

He wrung my hand. I dared not withdraw it, lest we should waken the sleepers.

William returned to the dining-room, and I had to show him that, if he did not cease looking gratefully at me, I must change my waiter. I also ordered him to stop telling me nightly how his wife was, but I continued to know, as I could not help seeing the girl Jenny from the window. Twice in a week I learned from this objectionable child that the ailing woman had again eaten all the tapioca. Then I became suspicious of William. I will tell why.

It began with a remark of Captain Upjohn's. We had been speaking of the inconvenience of not being able to get a hot dish served after 1 A.M., and he said:

"It is because these lazy waiters would strike. If the beggars had a love of their work, they would not rush away from the club the moment one o'clock strikes. That glum fellow who often waits on you takes to his heels the moment he is clear of the club steps. He ran into me the other night at the top of the street, and was off without apologizing."

"You mean the foot of the street, Upjohn," I said, for such is the way to Drury Lane.

"No; I mean the top. The man was running west."

"East."

"West."

I smiled, which so annoyed him that he bet me two to one in sovereigns. The bet could have been decided most quickly by asking William a question, but I thought, foolishly doubtless, that it might hurt his feelings, so I watched him leave the club. The possibility of Upjohn's winning the bet had seemed remote to me. Conceive my surprise, therefore, when William went westward.

Amazed, I pursued him along two streets without realizing that I was doing so. Then curiosity put me into a hansom. We followed William, and it proved to be a three-shilling fare, for running when he was in breath and walking when he was out of it, he took me to West Kensington.

I discharged my cab, and from across the street watched William's incomprehensible behavior. He had stopped at a dingy row of workmen's houses, and knocked at the darkened window of one of them. Presently a light showed. So far as I could see, someone pulled up the blind and for ten minutes talked to William. I was uncertain whether they talked, for the window was not opened, and I felt that, had William spoken through the glass loud enough to be heard inside, I must have heard him too. Yet he nodded and beckoned. I was still bewildered when, by setting off the way he had come, he gave me the opportunity of going home.

Knowing from the talk of the club what the lower orders are, could I doubt that this was some discreditable love affair of William's? His solicitude for his wife had been mere pretence; so far as it was genuine, it meant that he feared she might recover. He probably told her that he was detained nightly in the club till three.

I was miserable next day, and blamed the

devilled kidneys for it. Whether William was unfaithful to his wife was nothing to me, but I had two plain reasons for insisting on his going straight home from his club: the one, that, as he had made me lose a bet, I must punish him; the other, that he could wait upon me better if he went to bed betimes.

Yet I did not question him. There was something in his face that— Well, I seemed to see his dying wife in it.

I was so out of sorts that I could eat no dinner. I left the club. Happening to stand for some time at the foot of the street, I chanced to see the girl Jenny coming, and— No; let me tell the truth, though the whole club reads; I was waiting for her.

"How is William's wife to-day?" I asked.

"She told me to nod three times," the little slattern replied; "but she looked like nothink but a dead one till she got the brandy."

"Hush, child!" I said, shocked. "You don't know how the dead look."

"Bless yer," she answered, "don't I just! Why, I've helped to lay 'em out. I'm going on seven."

"Is William good to his wife?"

"Course he is. Ain't she his missis?"

"Why should that make him good to her?" I asked, cynically, out of my knowledge of the poor. But the girl, precocious in many ways, had never had my opportunities of studying the lower classes in the newspapers, fiction, and club talk. She shut one eye, and looking up wonderingly, said:

"Ain't you green—just!"

"When does William reach home at night?"

"'Tain't night; it's morning. When I wakes up at half dark and half light and hears a door shutting I know as it's either father going off to his work or Mr. Hicking coming home from his."

"Who is Mr. Hicking?"

"Him as we've been speaking on—William. We calls him mister, 'cause he's a toff. Father's just doing jobs in Covent Garden,

but Mr. Hicking, he's a waiter, and a clean shirt every day. The old woman would like father to be a waiter, but he hain't got the 'ristocratic look."

"What old woman?"

"Go 'long! that's my mother. Is it true there's a waiter in the club just for to open the door?"

"Yes, but——"

"And another just for to lick the stamps? My!"

"William leaves the club at one o'clock?" I said, interrogatively.

She nodded. "My mother," she said, "is one to talk, and she says to Mr. Hicking as he should get away at twelve, 'cause his missis needs him more'n the gentlemen need him. The old woman do talk."

"And what does William answer to that?"

"He says as the gentlemen can't be kept waiting for their cheese."

"But William does not go straight home when he leaves the club?"

"That's the kid."

"Kid!" I echoed, scarcely understanding, for knowing how little the poor love their children, I had asked William no questions about the baby.

"Didn't you know his missis had a kid?"

"Yes, but that is no excuse for William's staying away from his sick wife," I answered, sharply. A baby in such a home as William's, I reflected, must be trying, but still— Besides his class can sleep through any din.

"The kid ain't in our court," the girl explained. "He's in W., he is, and I've never been out of W. C.; leastwise, not as I knows on."

"This is W. I suppose you mean that the child is at West Kensington? Well, no doubt it was better for William's wife to get rid of the child——"

"Better!" interposed the girl. "'Tain't better for her not to have the kid. Ain't her not having him what she's always thinking on when she looks like a dead one?"

"How could you know that?"

"'Cause," answered the girl, illustrating her words with a gesture, "I watches her, and I sees her arms going this way, just like as she wanted to hug her kid."

"Possibly you are right," I said, frowning, "but William had put the child out to nurse because it disturbed his night's rest. A man who has his work to do——"

"You are green!"

"Then why have the mother and child been separated?"

"Along of that there measles. Near all the young 'uns in our court has 'em bad."

"Have you had them?"

"I said the young 'uns."

"And William sent the baby to West Kensington to escape infection?"

"Took him, he did."

"Against his wife's wishes?"

"Na-o!"

"You said she was dying for want of the child?"

"Wouldn't she raythe die than have the kid die?"

"Don't speak so heartlessly, child. Why does William not go straight home from the club? Does he go to West Kensington to see it?"

"'Taint a hit, it's an 'e. Course he do."

"Then he should not. His wife has the first claim on him."

"Ain't you green! It's his missis as wants him to go. Do you think she could sleep till she knowed how the kid was?"

"But he does not go into the house at West Kensington?"

"Is he soft? Course he don't go in, fear of taking the infection to the kid. They just holds the kid up at the window to him, so as he can have a good look. Then he comes home and tells his missis. He sits foot of the bed and tells."

"And that takes place every night? He can't have much to tell."

"He has just."

"He can only say whether the child is well or ill."

"My ! He tells what a difference there is in the kid since he see'd him last."

"There can be no difference ! "

"Go 'long ! Ain't a kid always growing ? Haven't Mr. Hicking to tell how the hair is getting darker, and heaps of things beside ? "

"Such as what ? "

"Like whether he larfed, and if he has her nose, and how as he knowed him. He tells her them things more'n once."

"And all this time he is sitting at the foot of the bed ? "

"'Cept when he holds her hand."

"But when does he get to bed himself ? "

"He don't get much. He tells her as he has a sleep at the club."

"He cannot say that."

"Hain't I heard him ? But he do go to his bed a bit, and then they both lies quiet, her pretending she is sleeping so as he can sleep, and him feared to sleep case he shouldn't wake up to give her the bottle stuff."

"What does the doctor say about her ? "

"He's a good one, the doctor. Sometimes he says she would get better if she could see the kid through the window."

"Nonsense!"

"And if she was took to the country."

"Then why does not William take her?"

"My! you are green! And if she drank port wines."

"Doesn't she?"

"No; but William he tells her about the gentlemen drinking them."

On the tenth day after my conversation with this unattractive child I was in my brougham, with the windows up, and I sat back, a paper before my face lest anyone should look in. Naturally, I was afraid of being seen in company of William's wife and Jenny, for men about town are uncharitable, and, despite the explanation I had ready, might have charged me with pitying William. As a matter of fact, William was sending his wife into Surrey to stay with an old nurse of mine, and I was driving her

down because my horses needed an outing. Besides, I was going that way, at any rate.

I had arranged that the girl Jenny, who was wearing an outrageous bonnet, should accompany us, because, knowing the greed of her class, I feared she might blackmail me at the club.

William joined us in the suburbs, bringing the baby with him, as I had foreseen they would all be occupied with it, and to save me the trouble of conversing with them. Mrs. Hicking I found too pale and fragile for a workingman's wife, and I formed a mean opinion of her intelligence from her pride in the baby, which was a very ordinary one. She created quite a vulgar scene when it was brought to her, though she had given me her word not to do so ; what irritated me, even more than her tears, being her ill-bred apology that she "had been 'feared baby wouldn't know her again." I would have told her they didn't know anyone for years had I not been afraid of the girl Jenny, who

dandled the infant on her knees and talked to it as if it understood. She kept me on tenterhooks by asking it offensive questions: such as, "Oo know who give me that bonnet?" and answering them herself, "It was the pretty gentleman there," and several times I had to affect sleep because she announced, "Kiddy wants to kiss the pretty gentleman."

Irksome as all this necessarily was to a man of taste, I suffered even more when we reached our destination. As we drove through the village the girl Jenny uttered shrieks of delight at the sight of flowers growing up the cottage walls, and declared they were "just like a music-'all without the drink license." As my horses required a rest, I was forced to abandon my intention of dropping these persons at their lodgings and returning to town at once, and I could not go to the inn lest I should meet inquisitive acquaintances. Disagreeable circumstances, therefore, compelled me to take tea with a waiter's family—close to a window,

too, through which I could see the girl Jenny talking excitedly to villagers, and telling them, I felt certain, that I had been good to William. I had a desire to go out and put myself right with those people.

William's long connection with the club should have given him some manners, but apparently his class cannot take them on, for, though he knew I regarded his thanks as an insult, he looked them when he was not speaking them, and hardly had he sat down, by my orders, than he remembered that I was a member of the club, and jumped up. Nothing is in worse form than whispering, yet again and again, when he thought I was not listening, he whispered to Mrs. Hicking, "You don't feel faint?" or "How are you now?" He was also in extravagant glee because she ate two cakes (it takes so little to put these people in good spirits), and when she said she felt like another being already, the fellow's face charged me with the change. I could not but conclude, from the way Mrs. Hicking let the baby pound

her, that she was stronger than she pretended.

I remained longer than was necessary, because I had something to say to William which I knew he would misunderstand, and so I put off saying it. But when he announced that it was time for him to return to London, at which his wife suddenly paled, so that he had to sign to her not to break down, I delivered the message.

"William," I said, "the head waiter asked me to say that you could take a fortnight's holiday just now. Your wages will be paid as usual."

Confound them! William had me by the hand, and his wife was in tears before I could reach the door.

"Is it your doing again, sir?" William cried.

"William!" I said, fiercely.

"We owe everything to you," he insisted. "The port wine——"

"Because I had no room for it in my cellar."

"The money for the nurse in London——"

"Because I objected to being waited on by a man who got no sleep."

"These lodgings——"

"Because I wanted to do something for my old nurse."

"And now, sir, a fortnight's holiday!"

"Good-by, William!" I said, in a fury.

But before I could get away, Mrs. Hicking signed to William to leave the room, and then she kissed my hand. She said something to me. It was about my wife. Somehow I—— What business had William to tell her about my wife?

They are all in Drury Lane now, and William tells me that his wife sings at her work just as she did eight years ago. I have no interest in this, and try to check his talk of it; but such people have no sense of propriety, and he even speaks of the girl Jenny, who sent me lately a gaudy pair of worsted gloves worked by her own hand. The meanest advantage they took of my weak-

ness, however, was in calling their baby after me. I have an uncomfortable suspicion, too, that William has given the other waiters his version of the affair, but I feel safe so long as it does not reach the committee.

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